

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
15 June 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Attack on Mao Tse-tung in North
Vietnamese Party Journal

1. The Vietnam Workers Party (VWP) has taken an unprecedented step by issuing an oblique, but nevertheless unmistakable, attack on Mao Tse-tung. The attack came in the form of an article by Hong Chuong, deputy editor of the party journal, Hoc Tap and published in the May issue.

2. Ostensibly a piece on Ho Chi Minh on his 77th birthday, Chuong's article instead addressed in detail the VWP attitude toward Communist leaders and the proper method of exercising leadership within a Communist Party. It contrasted the attitude of Ho and the VWP, who follow the correct road of "collective leadership," with the attitude of an unnamed "certain leader," who "acts in accordance with his subjective wishes" while ignoring party councils.

3. The article left no doubt as to the target of its attack by asserting that "a leader of the working class does not separate the working class from its vanguard, the Communist Party," a point repeatedly stressed by the USSR in its attacks on China and an unmistakable reference to Mao's creation and use of the "Red Guards" as a weapon against the regular party apparatus. In another swipe at Mao, Chuong observed that although the Vietnamese Party "respects and loves" Ho Chi Minh, "we do not deify him," because "deification of a leader will lower the role of the masses of people and even the leader himself." Mao is the only current Communist Party leader clearly identified with "deification."

4. Chuong also lashed out at the practice of leaders "who ignore collective leadership," arguing that only by obeying the "group of the party's leadership organ," (the politburo)

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can "one-sided and erroneous decisions be prevented." This is undoubtedly meant to be taken as a reference to Mao's autocratic treatment of his politburo and central committee--which have been subjected to a purge of Stalinist proportions during the past year.

5. The implications of this North Vietnamese personal assault on Mao for Sino-DRV relations are enormous. It should be noted, however, that one article--it is the first and thus far only such attack by Hanoi on Mao--does not necessarily constitute a campaign. We will have to wait and see whether this theme is picked up again by North Vietnamese publications before we can be sure that the VWP has decided to place itself in permanent and public opposition to Mao. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that Hanoi sometimes uses Hoc Tap for discussion of politics still under debate.

6. It seems unlikely, however, that on a matter of such great import as relations with Mao the party politburo which runs Hoc Tap would publish such an article unless it had fully considered the possible repercussions. The North Vietnamese leaders know Mao as well as any outsiders and undoubtedly realized that even an indirect attack on Mao might very well rule out any real cooperation with Peking as long as Mao runs China.

7. Thus far, however, all available evidence points to continued Chinese military, economic, and propaganda support for Hanoi.

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[REDACTED] Peking is still giving propaganda support to Hanoi's continued war effort and has mentioned Ho Chi Minh in favorable terms in recent days. It is possible that Peking has decided to overlook the Hong Chuong article and thus avoid a new provocation which might do further damage to its position in Hanoi.

8. The question remains as to why the North Vietnamese chose this time to assail Mao. There has been some friction in Sino-DRV relations for over two years as Hanoi has sought further help, both militarily and politically, from Moscow

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in its war for control of South Vietnam. From time to time Peking has interfered with Soviet military aid shipments to the DRV and has acrimoniously opposed any move by Hanoi in the diplomatic field to explore and exploit negotiations as a tactic against the US. It is possible that the attack on Mao is the result of the accumulation of North Vietnamese impatience or some new and more egregious piece of Chinese arrogance.

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10. The North Vietnamese party leadership has recently demonstrated some concern over possible adverse effects on the Vietnam Workers Party as a result of the excesses of the Cultural Revolution in China. The Hanoi leadership is worried because a large number of Vietnamese Communists, including some at high levels, have traditionally looked to Mao Tse-tung for guidance in the theoretical field as well as in certain practical areas. No doubt considerable confusion exists within the Vietnamese party over events in China.

11. Several recent authoritative pronouncements--a speech by party first secretary Le Duan and several articles in Hoc Tap--clearly reflect Hanoi's particular concern over Mao's unorthodox practice of establishing "Red Guards" to attack the regular party apparatus and leadership. The May issue of Hoc Tap which carried the Hong Chuong article, also carried an editorial which argued forcefully that the Vietnam Workers Party remains devoted to the orthodox Marxist-Leninist concept that the working class and its party--the Communist Party--must play the leading role in all "revolutionary struggles," whether the main task of the party is to wage a war of liberation or to build Communism in an already "liberated" country. The Soviets have charged that Mao ignores the role of the working class and that he relies instead on the army and peasants. In Vietnam, the Hoc Tap editorial declared, "no other class and no other party" can "lead all our people to victory." This constitutes a clear admonition to all party members that no "Red Guards" type movement will be tolerated in Vietnam.

12. A speech by Le Duan, given last December but only broadcast by Hanoi on 30 April, hammered home the same theme as Hoc Tap. In his lengthy and rather pedantic fashion, Le Duan

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explained to a conference of trade union officials the party's position on the leading role of the working class. Le Duan insisted that it is "absolutely indispensable" that the "leadership of the working class" be confirmed. He further asserted that the line of the Vietnamese revolution is "the political line of the working class and not of any other class."

13. It is clear from these statements that the North Vietnamese leadership is not only disturbed over the possible implications for their own party of the excesses in China but that they are now so annoyed by Mao's pretensions to have created a new and universally applicable theory of revolution that they are willing to engage in criticism of the Chinese.

14. Whatever the reason for the Chuong article, it is clear that it constitutes an indirect indication that Hanoi would not look adversely on the removal of Mao from power. The article stated that "if a leader commits errors, yet refuses to correct them, and insistently maintains them, he cannot keep his leadership role forever." A measure of just how extraordinary this particular statement is can be gained by considering that even in the 1963-1964 period when the VWP was echoing Peking's attacks on the "modern revisionist" leadership of Khrushchev, the North Vietnamese did not openly suggest that they would approve of his removal from office.

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